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THE FABER GALLERY

TITIAN

with an introduction and notes by

JAMES LAVER

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TITIAN

(1477?—1576)

with an introduction
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FABER AND FABER

State Museum
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Introduction by James Laver

Art is like a plant. The seed is blown about the world until it finds a congenial soil and strikes root. Then comes the thrusting stem, straining upward to the light, the graceful, tender leaves, the first shy flowers. At last the prize bloom which dazzles with its colour and intoxicates with its scent. We need not follow the metaphor further, nor that other tempting analogy which compares the natural history of Art to the seasons of the year. The world—even the world of critics—is agreed that Venetian painting is Art in flower, and that if Botticelli is himself Primavera, Titian is high summer. Here is no pale and filtered sunlight but the whole gamut of colour, the glowing petal, the ripened fruit. Even his women are full blown.

Venetian painting was late in developing, compared with the rest of Italy. Perhaps the Signori were too busy with their commerce, perhaps the air of the lagoons and the bustle of a mart more than half oriental were hostile to pious meditation. One cannot imagine a Venetian Fra Angelico. Even when the cult of the hero replaced the reverence for the saint (for that change is the essence of the Renaissance), Venice did not quite join in. For she had no one ruling family, acknowledged or unacknowledged, and when her painters came to look for a subject, the subject they found was Venice—and themselves. We can see it already in Carpaccio and Gentile Bellini. Here was such a heaping of wealth as the world had hardly seen since the collapse of Rome. With such jewels why should one ask for stars? With so much beauty on earth why should one pine for heaven? Some have complained that the Venetians, even when they were painting religious subjects, were lacking in all spirituality. Michelangelo remarked that Titian could not draw. He could, but not with the hard outline of the Florentines. One can't have everything.

The Ages of Faith were past, the Counter-Reformation still in the future. Here was a breathing space for (if you will) the illusions of Humanism, but if the flame of this enthusiasm was a false one, it is a fire at which we can still warm our hands. It was a period in which the love of life rose to its apogee: an age as different as possible, both from the Middle Ages and alas! from us. And of that age Titian was the perfect expression. The age was his, his own years more than spanned it, for like other golden ages it did not last very long.

Tiziano Vecellio was born in 1477 (or a few years later) at Pieve, a hill-village in the Cadore region of the Dolomites, part of the Venetian territory, with a landscape very different from that of the Lagoons. It was not until he was about ten years old that he was brought to Venice, and, his budding talent having already declared itself, was entered as a pupil in the studio of Sebastiano Zuccato. Zuccato was a worker in mosaic, a craft particularly appropriate to Venice, since the salt air destroyed fresco-paintings, and mosaic was the only way in which the interiors of churches could be given warmth and colour before the possibilities of the new discovery of oil-painting had been realised.

Knowledge of the new technique had reached Venice only a few years before Titian was born, and one of the earliest artists to adopt the new method was Giovanni Bellini. It is very significant therefore that Titian became his pupil and soon absorbed all that the master had to teach him: which was a great deal, for Giovanni Bellini is himself one of the glories of the Renaissance. His two other famous pupils were Giacomo Palma, the elder, known as Palma Vecchio and Giorgio Barbarelli di Castelfranco, who, in the heaven of art, is called Giorgione.

Both these men were younger than Titian but Giorgione, at least, matured more quickly and in his short span of life (for he died of the plague in 1510), it was he who influenced Titian and not the other way round. Even when he was dead that influence persisted, and Bernard Berenson goes so far as to say that "Titian, in spite of a sturdier, less refined nature, did nothing for a generation after Giorgione's death but work on his lines".

Giorgione was a pioneer, and a poet. He brought to painting not only a richness of colouring it had hardly known before, not only a capacity for clothing his figures in an enveloping atmosphere and so giving depth and harmony to the whole picture space, but a new emotional attitude. In his works the persons of classical mythology disport themselves in an idyllic landscape, if disport be not altogether too vigorous a word for the movements of these somnambulists. He created a new dream world, as Watteau was to do two hundred years later: a world of languid gestures and the soft plucking of strings—a world epitomised in the famous picture called *The Tempest* (reproduced in Faber Gallery "Venetian Paintings")

The extent of Titian's debt to Giorgione will always be a matter of dispute. Something he owed to Bellini and Palma also, as can be seen in the pictures he produced between 1499 and 1505: in the *Dead Christ* in the Scuola di San Rocco and in *Bishop Jacopo Pesaro presented to St. Peter* now owned by the Antwerp Museum. In the celebrated *Sacred and Profane Love* in the Borghese he is Giorgionesque—with a difference. In spite of its resemblances, here is something which Titian alone could have painted.

By 1507, by which time he was about thirty years old, he was well enough known to be commissioned to paint one of the principal frescoes on the exterior of the Fon-

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Plate 1. *Venus and Adonis.* See page 24

daco de' Tedeschi, or German warehouse. This work was to involve him in many difficulties before it was finished, but his troubles were nothing to those of the Republic itself. For in the following year the Venetian armies were disastrously defeated by the forces of the League of Cambrai and Venice lost a great part of her territory on the mainland: Bergamo, Brescia and Cremona, Padua, Verona and Vicenza. Had the Venetians but known it, even greater events had happened the consequences of which were ultimately to undermine the very foundations of her greatness: the discovery of America, and of the new route to the Indies round the Cape of Good Hope. They had had a first intimation of these events when in 1504, for the first time in Venetian history, the spice ships returned empty from Alexandria and Beyrout.

The immediate consequence of the defeat was to fill Venice with refugees, many of them painters and craftsmen, and it was, perhaps, because of their growing competition that Titian left Venice for a time and worked elsewhere. But he was back again in 1512, and it is just

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this period of his life which we should be only too glad to know more about. For some time between 1512 and 1525—so uncertain are the chroniclers—he married. The name of the lady is said to have been Cecilia and she is alleged to have been the daughter of a barber from the district round Titian's native place. One authority, Gronau, says that he married her in haste when she was ill and seemed about to die; another, the Abbot Cadorin, declares that the world continued to suppose that she was the painter's mistress when she was, in fact, his wife. Another authority declares boldly that he married her in 1525 in order to legitimize his two children Pomponio and Orazio.

Whatever the truth, her superb and opulent beauty begins to appear in his pictures early in the second decade of the sixteenth century; and even after her death—for she died in 1530—the feminine ideal which she has represented continued to dominate his art. It is an ideal completely different from that of the Florentines. Botticelli's Venus was a slender girl, still frightened of her own beauty; the Venetian Venus is more mature, rounded in all her forms, and with unselfconscious pride receives the homage of the world. Both are blonde, but Titian's goddess has hair bleached to an even paler gold in the Venetian sun. She belongs to a less restlessly intellectual, more hedonistic, more luxurious world. She is more placid, more oriental, with a hint of the odalisque in a harem. It was not for nothing that Venice was the gateway to the East.

Meanwhile Titian's fame was steadily growing. In 1512, the year of his return to Venice and of the beginning of his liaison with Cecilia, he was charged with completing the paintings left unfinished by Giovanni Bellini in the hall of the Great Council in the Doge's Palace. It was not, however, until four years later that Bellini died, and the younger man succeeded to the full emoluments of the place.

In the same year he made his first visit to Ferrara and established contact with its ruler Alfonso d'Este, one of the most cultivated princes of the Peninsular. It is thought that one of the pictures he painted for him was the famous *Venus Anadyomene*, Venus wringing the water from her hair as she rises from the sea.[1] Titian was now working on many pictures at the same time, leaving some of them, for years, unfinished in his studio, until the moment came to complete them with as vigorous a brush and as fresh an impulse as when they were first conceived.

In addition to all his other commissions, including the many from Alfonso, he was working on one of the supreme masterpieces of his religious painting: the *Assumption of the Virgin* for the high altar of the Church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frati Minori. This was an enormous work in which the painter had wilfully foreshortened the figures and exaggerated the gestures so that it could be seen to advantage at a considerable height above the floor of the church. The good monks were at first doubtful of its propriety—as indeed, in one sense, they well might be, for the picture contains the seed of that theatricalization of religion which is the essence of the Jesuit Baroque—but its success was instantaneous. The Imperial Ambassador offered to buy it forthwith, and it established Titian's European reputation at a single stroke. Most lovers of his art, however, will prefer the frankly pagan *Bacchus and Ariadne* (Plate 4) which he was at this time painting for Duke Alfonso.

Titian was famous, but he still lacked what we should now call a press agent. The lack was soon to be supplied, for in 1527 there arrived in Venice, among the refugees from the Sack of Rome, the notorious Pietro Aretino, sometimes called the first of the journalists, in an age when the two professions of journalism and blackmail were not, perhaps, very clearly distinguished. There are, in history, curious exceptions to the rule that a person is known by his friends. Gilles de Rais, the original Bluebeard, was the companion-in-arms of Joan of Arc, and Titian was the intimate friend of Aretino for more than a quarter of a century.

Aretino was a truly astonishing character, a kind of gangster of the pen—and the tongue—who sold "protection" to anyone who would purchase it; and many, including princes and nobles, were only too willing to send him money, jewels and pictures, to keep his table in wine and every kind of delicacy and to load his bull neck with golden chains, in return for a "good press". He formed, with Titian and the architect Sansovino, a kind of triple alliance. He lived like a prince. In his palazzo on the Grand Canal he gave innumerable banquets and parties which frequently degenerated into orgies—orgies, be it said, in which Titian seems to have taken little part, for we find Aretino complaining, with a touch of humorous banter, about the painter's respectability. The charm of his conversation and of his society must have been considerable. He was no mean poet and as a dramatist he foreshadows some of the methods, and triumphs, of Molière. The famous "Cortegiana" was already in his papers when he arrived in Venice.

One of Aretino's first actions was to send his portrait by Titian to Federigo Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, in order to make interest for both himself and the painter. But Titian had been in touch with the Mantuan Court since 1523 and Aretino was really flying at higher game. In the words of Vasari: "In 1530, when the Emperor Charles V was in Bologna, Titian, by the intervention of Pietro Aretino, was invited to that city by Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici, and there he made a magnificent portrait of his Majesty in full armour." Thus began his connection with the House of Hapsburg which was to be one of the dominant factors in the patronage of his art for the rest of his life.

That the Emperor should be in Bologna at this period reminds us of the confused state of Italian politics. The

[1] London, Bridgewater House.

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brutal Sack of Rome by his troops had shocked Europe but three years before, and now the unhappy Pope Clement VII was on his way to Bologna to make his peace with the conqueror. Cesare Borgia's dream of a unified Italy seemed about to be realised in an altogether different sense from the one he had demanded. Italy was to be unified, it seemed, under the heel of the Habsburgs, and only Venice had retained any real independence. But we must not read into the emotions of Titian, or of any man of his time, a national patriotism which was still far in the future. Charles V became his most persistent, as well as his most exalted, patron. In 1533 he created Titian "Count of the Lateran Palace of our Court and of the Imperial Consistory", with the title of Count Palatine and the rank of Knight of the Golden Spur, honours almost, though not quite, unprecedented for a painter—since Gentile Bellini had been created Count Palatine by the Emperor Frederick III.

The beautiful Cecilia died in 1530, the year of her husband's first meeting with the Emperor. She had been for some years his wife, but had long ceased to be his model. Soon after the arrival of Aretino, whether inspired by him or not, Titian produced a number of mythological pictures, including the celebrated *Venus of Urbino* that hymn to carnal beauty which has bewitched the world ever since.[1] Perhaps the model for this was the same as for the almost equally famous *Girl with a Fur* (Plate 6). Perhaps she was one of Aretino's ladies; she was certainly not Cecilia. There is no need to suppose any new romance; she was simply a beautiful woman Titian loved to paint.

After Cecilia's death, Titian's sister Orsa kept house for the family, and a year later they all moved out of the congested city to a semi-rural retreat in the suburbs. The house lay to the north of Venice, on the edge of a wide lagoon, with a view to Murano and even, on clear days, to the Cadorine mountains which Titian had known as a youth. At first he had only a partial lease of the premises but he grew so fond of the place that in 1549 he bought the property outright, and it was here that he died.

An impression of the kind of life he lived there has been preserved for us by Francesco Priscianese, the Grammarian, who describes dining in the delightful garden of "Messer Teziano Vecellio" in company with Aretino and Sansovino. The choicest wines and most exquisite dishes were served in the open air and, as the sun set, the whole lagoon in front of the house was filled with gondolas full of beautiful women, singing and playing musical instruments.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that Titian had now, in his fifties, settled down to a life of cultivated and luxurious ease. He continued to be as busy as ever, and with the growth of his European fame, the demands of his princely patrons grew ever more exigeant. For Federigo of Mantua he painted a *St. Jerome* and a *Magdalene* "as beautiful but as tearful as possible" (perhaps her beauty is more convincing than her tears); from 1536 he was executing many commissions for the Duke of Urbino (including the *Venus of Urbino*). The Emperor was urging him to come to Spain; there were repeated invitations to Rome.

It was to Rome that eventually he went and there he was lodged in the Belvedere, with Vasari to act as his guide. In 1543 he painted (probably at Bologna) the great portrait *Pope Paul III* (Plate 7) and two years later, probably in Rome, that fascinating, alarming picture of the same old wolf and his cubs *Pope Paul III with his grandsons Ottavio and Cardinal Farnese* (now in the Naples Museum). In 1546 he was in Florence, and in 1548 he made the journey to Augsburg which resulted in the masterpiece *The Emperor Charles V on horseback at the battle of Mühlberg*[1] He also painted the portrait of the future Philip II which, sent to England, induced Mary Tudor to accept him as a husband.

The world changed. Emperors and patrons passed away, and still Titian went on painting. His boon companions left him. Aretino died in 1556, laughing at a bawdy joke. Titian survived for another twenty years producing pictures at the rate of one a month, and with no sign of diminishing power. He died at last of plague, in 1576, as Giorgione had died more than sixty years before. He was over ninety—perhaps indeed, as he himself claimed, almost a centenarian.

When he was born the medieval world was still in existence, with its knights in armour and proud independent cities. Charles VIII had not invaded Italy and Columbus had not set sail. The Renaissance was at its springtime; the Reformation had not yet happened. In England, unimportant country on the edge of the world, the Wars of the Roses were still in progress. When he died, the modern age had begun. The Wars of Religion convulsed the Continent; the New World had been called into existence; Elizabeth sat upon the English throne. In painting alone what changes had occurred, from the golden background of a hieratic vision to the chiaroscuro of everyday life !

We cannot do more than sketch the outline of a life that lasted so long and was so full of labour; nor can we sum up his achievement in a phrase. Perhaps he was the greatest pure painter, the greatest virtuoso of the brush, that ever existed. Rubens comes near him, but then, without Titian, Rubens would have been unthinkable. And so many other painters too would have been unthinkable without the astounding Venetian. Without him could there have been a Velasquez, or a Hals, or a Goya? Landscape, portrait, the painting of regal magnificence or solemn ceremony: all would have been impoverished if he had never lived, would indeed have been quite other. And if the love of life is ever reborn, if there is ever a renaissance of Humanism, it is to this fountain-head that men will, and must, return.

[1] Reproduced in Faber Gallery 'Homage to Venus'.

[1] Reproduced in Faber Gallery 'Royal Portraits'.

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Plate 2

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN

London: National Gallery
50 in. by 38¼ in.

The picture belongs to the period of Titian's stay in Padua, that is to say, almost at the beginning of his work as a painter. It is sometimes called *La Schiavona* and sometimes *Caterina Cornaro*, thus confusing it with the much later portrait of Caterina Cornaro, painted in 1542. The work here reproduced was probably painted about 1508, and the confusion may have arisen from the fact that it was Ser Alvise Cornaro, a prominent citizen of Padua, who was Titian's patron in that city and employed him to decorate the walls of his house in fresco.

The arrangement of the picture is unusual, although Giorgione and several Venetian painters of the epoch had used the device of a stepped barricade, and Titian uses it again in a male portrait of the same period. By a happy convention the profile portrait of the lady is sculptured in low relief on the balustrade against which she stands, thus showing her both full-face and side-face. The colour scheme is still Giorgione's, as it is in the Paduan frescoes, but the originality of the handling is nonetheless undeniable. In Hans Tietze's happy phrase: "Titian speaks his own words in the tones of Giorgione".

Recently there has been a certain revival of interest in those alleged rules of composition which Croce so contemptuously dismissed as "the astrology of aesthetic". Certainly in this painting Titian seems to have been almost obsessed by the "golden section". The most obvious example is the point where the balustrade meets the right hand edge of the picture so as to divide it into unequal halves in such a way that the smaller is to the greater as the greater is to the whole. Sometimes great artists appear to do something of the kind by instinct, but in this painting Titian is plainly working rather self-consciously to rule. The picture is constructed with almost mathematical accuracy.

Various attempts have been made to identify the sitter, but without any conspicuous success. Some critics have noted a fancied resemblance between the young woman and the sitter for the Virgin in the painting in the Uffizi known as the *Madonna and Child with St. Anthony and St. John*; but if so, the type was soon to be superseded by the somewhat slenderer "Violante" ideal which was to be Titian's for the next twenty years.

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Plate 3

CHRIST AND THE MAGDALENE

London: National Gallery
42½ in. by 35½ in.

This picture, painted between 1513 and 1517, is one of Titian's earliest masterpieces. In the oldest records we have it is ascribed to Titian, yet nothing in the master's *œuvre* has produced more disputes among the critics. Some of the most eminent have dismissed the possibility of its being by Titian at all; others have thought that he may have had a hand in it; all are agreed that it is so Giorgionesque that we must look to Titian's short-lived contemporary and master for its inspiration if not for its handling. The peculiar and characteristic world of the imagination which Giorgione called into existence is here revealed at its most expressive; his is the tender light and the lovingly handled foliage, his the interest in landscape for its own sake, his the delicate grace of the figures and the rhythmical pattern which binds the whole composition together.

As an added confusion, the hill with the houses on it in the background of the picture is very similar to that in Giorgione's *Dresden Venus* and in the fragment of the *Cupid* in Vienna, while reversed, it is to be seen also in *Sacred and Profane Love*, which no one has ever suggested to be by any other hand than Titian's.

Perhaps the fallacy behind all this controversy is the same that confuses so much Biblical criticism. The attempt to separate the work of different masters on grounds purely stylistic depends on the illusion that a man can never vary his style, can never be the victim—or the beneficiary—of an overwhelming influence. But Titian is known to have been profoundly influenced by Giorgione not only during the latter's lifetime but for years after his death.

However it be, the picture is one of the supreme achievements of painting. It might be called the grandfather of all attempts at portraying landscape for its own sake. It is at once deeply religious and profoundly human. The adoring wonder of the Magdalene who seems to be dragging herself forward on her knees, the tender solicitude of the Saviour's withdrawal, both touch the heart and elevate the mind.

In the seventeenth century the painting was in the Muselli Collection at Verona; for the greater part of the eighteenth it was owned by the Orléans family. The poet-collector Samuel Rogers bequeathed it to the National Gallery in 1855.

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Plate 4

BACCHUS AND ARIADNE

London: National Gallery
69 in. by 75 in.

The cultivated Alfonso I of Ferrara had his study decorated with frescoes by Bellini, and, still thirsting for beauty, employed Titian to complete the decorations. Sometime in the early fifteen-twenties Titian produced three pictures for this purpose: the *Bacchanal* and *The Offering to Venus*, both now in Madrid, and, a finer picture than either, the London *Bacchus and Ariadne*.

The picture is a paean in honour of the pagan enthusiasms of the Renaissance. Here indeed, in the legend from Catallus, the Ancient World is born again, as Bacchus leaps from his leopard-drawn chariot to take possession of the startled and fascinated Ariadne, by right of his godhead and the intoxication he brings with him. In his train are the fauns and satyrs and Bacchants. He rides as it were on the crest of a wave and the wave is all the irresistible forces of Nature. All light and love and every sensuous delight is concentrated in that glorious golden figure, caught in the act of leaping, yet without a hint of the frozen immobility of the snapshot. It is a whirl of movement. Indeed the only static figure is that of Ariadne herself who, scared as she is, does not even wish to flee. Surely, when Strauss, four hundred years later, wrote the bravura passages of his *Ariadne auf Naxos*, it was this painting he had in mind and not the comparatively cold words of the Roman poet!

The picture remained in the castle at Ferrara until 1598. Caesar d'Este, Duke of Modena, no longer Caesar even of his small principality of Ferrara, had been compelled to renounce his sovereign rights. He retained his property rights, but they did not help him. In spite of his protests, Cardinal Aldobrandini, the Papal Legate, removed all these pictures and took them to Rome. For forty years they were exhibited in the Ludovisi Palace until, in 1638, the *Bacchanal* and *The Offering to Venus* were presented to the King of Spain. The *Bacchus* and *Ariadne* remained in Rome, in the Aldobrandini and Barberini Galleries, until the early nineteenth century. The English dealer-collector Buchanan bought it in 1806 and transported it to England. Twenty years later he sold it to the National Gallery where it has remained ever since, glowing in the English air with a gleam of the Italian sun.

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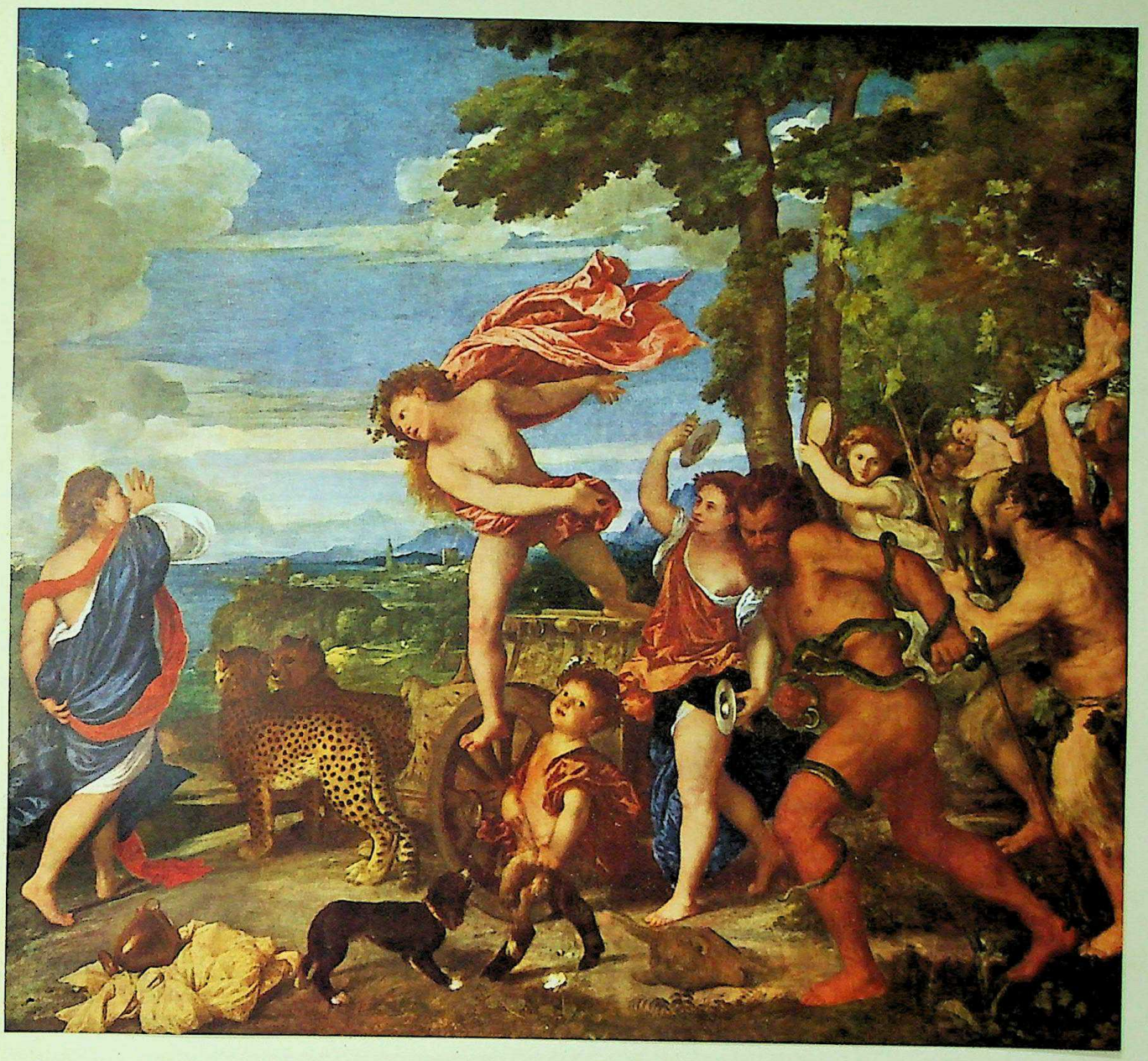

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Plate 5

CARDINAL IPPOLITO DE' MEDICI

Florence: Pitti Palace
54⅜ in. by 41¾ in.

Ippolito de' Medici was a typical figure of the Italian Renaissance, and of the Catholic hierarchy before the Council of Trent had reformed it. He was the illegitimate son of Giuliano de' Medici, and thus a grandson of Lorenzo il Magnifico. He was born at Urbino in 1511 and brought up in Rome by his uncle Pope Leo X. He was a Cardinal at eighteen, and Vice-Chancellor of the Church at twenty-one. In his palace in the Campomarzio he led the life rather of a secular prince than an ecclesiastic, surrounded by poets, painters and musicians, but also by soldiers and cut-throats of all kinds. Perhaps we need not trouble in which category we should place Aretino, but his credit with the Cardinal was great, and it was through the influence of both that Titian was presented to the Emperor Charles V while he was at Bologna in 1530. Charles was back in Bologna a couple of years later for a conference with Pope Clement VII, and Titian painted him again. "Before departing from Bologna", says Vasari, "Tiziano also painted a portrait of the above-named Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici in Hungarian dress".

The Cardinal was apparently very proud of this costume which he had assumed when in command of 4,000 musketeers taking part in the campaign against the Turks for the liberation of Hungary, and in it he posed for Titian with the Hungarian mace in his right hand and his left hand on the scabbard of the scimitar.

Two years later he was dead. Seeking to obtain control of Florence in rivalry with Alessandro de' Medici, he decided to go to Naples and put his claim before the Emperor. He died at Itri on August 10th, 1535, possibly of malaria, but, according to the popular story, poisoned by his own cup-bearer at the instigation of Alessandro.

The picture, in which Titian has not only seized the ruthless yet cultivated personality of Ippolito, but produced a daring and exquisite colour harmony of wine-purple and grey, found its way to Florence and in Vassari's time was in the "guardaroba" of Duke Cosimo. It is still in the Pitti, and is therefore one of the least travelled of the master's paintings.

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Plate 6

GIRL WITH A FUR

Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum
37⅜ in. by 24¾ in.

Much controversy has raged over this beautiful picture, which Londoners have recently had an opportunity of inspecting in the exhibition of pictures from Vienna at the Tate Gallery. Even the date has been disputed and critics have vied with one another in constructing romantic stories woven around the alleged identity of the sitter. The close resemblance which she bears to the painting now called *La Bella* but formerly supposed to be a portrait of Eleanora Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino, seems plain enough; although even this conclusion is a dangerous one in view of the family likeness which the feminine ideal seems to impose upon all portraits of beautiful women painted in the same period. The same model, if we accept the hypothesis, appears in the *Venus of Urbino*, referred to in the Introduction; and, in spite of the Renaissance attitude to the nude, especially with the excuse of a mythological subject, it may well be doubted if a Duchess would allow herself to be painted in a state of complete nudity, even by so great an artist as Titian.

It was probably the *Venus of Urbino* which Vasari saw in the cabinet of the Duke of Urbino. He describes it as "the most beautiful Venus or nude lady painted by Titian, and which is said to be the portrait of a favourite of Duke Guidobaldo II". It is probable that the *Girl with a Fur* represents the same ducal favourite and not the mistress of Titian, as she has sometimes been called, still less Eleanora Gonzaga.

The picture has had a curious history. Painted about the year 1536 (that is in the same year as *La Bella* and two years before the *Venus of Urbino*), it passed into the possession of the Spaniards and remained in Spain until 1623, when the future Charles I of England made his famous journey to Madrid to seek a bride. He did not obtain the living lady, but was given this picture, and it remained in his possession until his collection was so unfortunately scattered under the Commonwealth, after which it passed to Vienna, to form part of the Imperial collections in the Stallburg.

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Plate 7

POPE PAUL III

Naples: National Museum
41⅜ in. by 32¼ in.

Paul III might be called the last of the Renaissance, and the first of the Counter-Reformation Popes. It was he who reformed the College of Cardinals and brought the Council of Trent into existence, but if he was devoted to the Church he was even more concerned with the fortunes of his family, and his nepotism was even more outrageous than that of his predecessors. As Alessandro Farnese, he became a Cardinal in 1493 largely through the influence which his sister, the beautiful Giulia, exercised over Pope Alexander VI. He was elected Pope in 1534 and set about promoting the fortunes of his illegitimate children, even alienating the estates of the Holy See in their favour.

Through the influence of the Pope's grandson, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, Titian was presented to His Holiness on April 22nd, 1543 on the occasion of the Pope's entry into Ferrara. He followed the Court to Bologna and it was probably there that he painted this portrait. When he did so, it is generally agreed, he had in mind the famous portrait by Raphael of Pope Julius II. He had reason to know this portrait well for the one that has come down to us (and is now in the Pitti) is actually his copy, the original being lost.

In the handling of this first portrait of the Pope, Titian reverted to his earlier, more meticulous manner, yet with a certainty of design and a breadth of handling which he never surpassed. The picture is certainly one of the masterpieces of his portraiture, and indeed of all portraiture. Never was the character of an old man more convincingly portrayed, from the shining hand clutching the wallet to the suspicious watchful eye. It has been well said that in Raphael's picture Pope Julius is alone in the room with the painter and is taking his ease in reflective mood; while Titian's Paul is not alone and not at ease but as much on the alert as a spider in the centre of his web.

Titian produced several other portraits of Paul III, including the one with his grandsons referred to in the Introduction. The picture here reproduced shows him at his most vigorous. It came to Naples as part of the Farnese inheritance and has remained there ever since.

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Plate 8

DIANA AND CALLISTO

Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum
71⅝ in. by 79⅛ in.

Philip II of Spain, in the early years of his kingship, was not yet the gloomy bigot he was afterwards to become. It is true that he was already religious and was anxious to possess religious paintings, but he also ordered from Titian a number of *Poesie*, that is pictures painted from themes taken from the pagan mythology. Titian wrote to him, in June 1559, to announce that he had just finished two such paintings, *Diana and Actaeon*[1] and *Diana and Callisto*. He added that as soon as they were shipped he would paint a *Christ on the Mount*, and finish two more *Poesie*, the *Rape of Europa* and *Actaeon torn by his Dogs*. After some final touches (for Titian though now about eighty, was as conscientious as he had been in his youth) the two first pictures were dispatched. They remained in Spain until 1704 when Philip V gave them to the Duc de Grammont. From him they passed to the Orléans Collection and thence to the Duke of Bridgewater.

While the artist was working on the Callisto picture for Philip, another patron asked him to paint a replica. He therefore transferred the general design to another canvas, but made many changes of detail. It is this second version which is here reproduced.

The painting shows Diana in the act of discovering that one of her nymphs, Callisto, has broken her vow of chastity and is, in fact, pregnant. The poor woman had been the victim of one of those wooings in disguise which occupied so much of the time of Jupiter. He wooed Leda in the guise of a swan, Europa as a bull, Io as a cloud, Danaë in a shower of gold, and Alcmene in the shape of her own husband. Even more unfair was his attack on Callisto for he made love to her disguised as Diana herself. All this, however, did not soften the heart of the goddess, who condemned her too complaisant nymph out of hand and, as a punishment, turned her into a bear. The subject was a favourite one with late Renaissance artists as, like *Diana and Actaeon* it provided an excuse to paint a bathing scene with a complicated rhythm of female figures.

In the middle of the seventeenth century this version of the *Diana and Callisto* belonged to the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm of Austria and is seen as a centre piece of one gallery in a picture by Teniers showing the Archduke inspecting his collection.

[1] Reproduced in Faber Gallery 'Venetian Paintings'.

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Plate 9

NYMPH AND SHEPHERD

Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum
59 in. by 73⅝ in.

This "Pastorale", as it is sometimes called, belongs to the penultimate decade of Titian's life, a period when he was bringing the knowledge of a lifetime to bear on paintings of a wide variety of theme. In addition to his portraits and religious and symbolical paintings, he was turning back once more to mythological subjects as if in an endeavour to recapture his youth. A Golden Age the picture certainly represents, the Golden Age of the world and the Golden Age of his own career when he was steeped in the romantic glow of Giorgione, the master who had now been dead for more than fifty years. As if to acknowledge his debt to his old master and comrade, Titian echoes, in the pose of the nymph, the position of the woman in one of Giorgione's pictures. The painting itself has been lost but its composition has been preserved for us in an engraving by Giulio Campagnola.

But if, in his *Nymph and Shepherd*, Titian looks back in sentiment and subject, stylistically he looks forward, so far forward indeed that at the very end of the nineteenth century the later French Impressionists were painting very much in the same manner, the contours of their figures lost in the enveloping atmosphere, the brush strokes broken and as if vibrating with light. Titian had discovered, long before Seurat, Sisley and Pissarro, that half-tones need not be mixed on the palette but could be suggested by means of juxtaposed brush-strokes of pure colour. The rust-red in the shepherd's cloak is, as Emil Waldmann pointed out, the only blended tone in the picture. The modelling is the culmination of Titian's long progress away from the linear method of the Florentines. There are no outlines at all; every contour is a receding curve, so that the figures almost seem to move as we watch them, the nymph to roll over towards the shepherd and the shepherd to put the pipe to his lips.

The artist changed his mind several times over the composition. The arm which rests upon the nymph's white shoulder originally belonged to the shepherd. It was only later that he was given a pipe.

In the middle of the seventeenth century this picture was also in the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm's collection; and it is also seen in Teniers' painting (now in Madrid) of the Archduke's gallery. (*cf.* note on Plate 8).

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Plate 10

MOTHER AND CHILD

London: National Gallery
29¾ in. by 24⅞ in.

This *Mother and Child*, or, as it is sometimes titled *Virgin and Child*, belongs to the last years of the master's life. It must have been painted sometime between 1570 and 1576, that is to say when the artist was in his nineties. It is an outstanding example of the undiminished energy of his mind and the unfaltering skill of his hand. As one of his most penetrating critics has remarked: "This last image of the Madonna is infinitely tender and profound. Like a vision in a dream the ideal of his youth has returned to the aged master, and now, thanks to the extent of his experience, he can represent her in a form which reveals at once his great art and his deep emotion."

The very fact that the picture can be called either the "Virgin and Child" or simply the "Mother and Child" gives us, as it were, the key to the development of Renaissance painting, spanned by the lifetime of Titian himself. It was precisely this humanising of the divine which separated the masters of the High Renaissance from the Primitives. The change was not all gain. Where the earlier painters had presented the body of the faithful with an image that could be worshipped, the later painters offered to the spectators a picture that could be enjoyed. Another step and the religious motive shrinks to a mere decoration. With Titian, in the painting here reproduced, this step has not quite been taken. The painting indeed represents, not the Queen of Heaven but a human mother, and yet the profundity of feeling in the picture and the breadth of handling seems to elevate the mere woman to cosmic significance. Human motherhood is itself divine, the painter seems to be saying: this is no single mother, but the Mother of all Mankind. And so perhaps it does not matter what we call the picture. Its greatness either way is undiminished.

Until 1892 it was in the collection of the Earl of Dudley. It passed then to the Mond Collection and was bequeathed to the London National Gallery in 1924.

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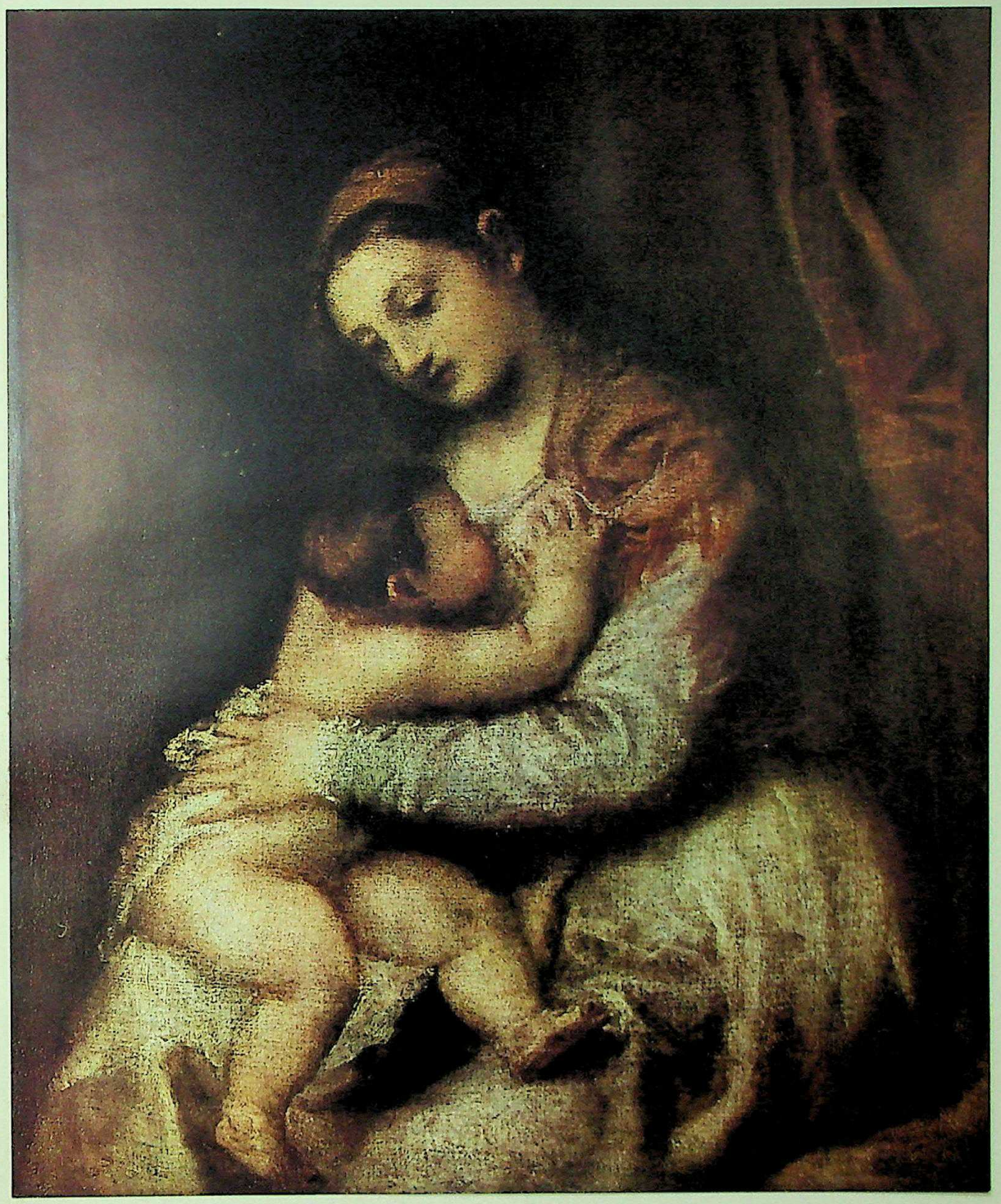

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Note on Plate 1

VENUS AND ADONIS

London: National Gallery
69 in. by 72 in.

In 1554 Philip of Spain was in England for the marriage which his father had arranged with Mary of England, and it was here that he received from Titian the picture of *Venus and Adonis*. This particular painting did not remain in England, but was taken to Spain by Philip and is now in the Prado. While it was still in Titian's studio it excited great admiration, and several replicas were made with minor variations in the colouring and design. It was long supposed that the version in the National Gallery was one of these replicas, but Sir Charles Holmes[1] succeeded in making a convincing case for another view: that the picture in London is nothing less than Titian's original version of which the Prado painting is an elaboration.

When the perished and discoloured varnish was removed it was found that there were traces of the grey outlines on which the design had been based. Also that the mass of foliage on the left had been reduced by painting sky over it. In a word, all the alterations and changes of mind in the picture were just those that are made by an artist who is not yet certain of his final design, and not those in the least likely to be made by a copyist or by the master himself in the course of producing a replica. These conclusions, if they are accepted, lend a particular interest to the London version which some may actually prefer, since Adonis here is still the boy of the legend instead of the much more mature figure shown in the Prado.

The London picture was, for a time, in the Palazzo Colonna in Rome. It was brought to this country in 1800 and was purchased from the Angerstein Collection twenty-four years later. Two other versions of the same subject, formerly in the Darnley and Spencer collections, are both now in America.

[1] In an article in the *Burlington Magazine*, XLIV. 1924.

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